

The
**LORD
SORCIER**



**OLIVIA
ATWATER**

THE LORD SORCIER



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STARWATCH
PRESS

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CHAPTER 1



Like any good English army man, Albert preferred to avoid complaining. It had been a long week of trudging on mountain roads, of course—in bitter winter weather, no less—but this, he decided, was simply to be borne. His sturdy, more expensive boots were holding up much better than those of the other men, at least, and he decided he ought to thank his mother in his next letter home for insisting on their purchase.

“Bollocks,” cursed Gillett, next to him. “Didn’t seem so bloody far when we was headed *to* Spain.”

“Didn’t seem so bloody far because we was *winnin’* then,” grouched Baxter, on Albert’s other side. “That smug French git’s goin’ to take back everything we left behind, too.”

“Stiff upper lip, chaps,” Albert reminded them helpfully. “Napoleon has his own troubles, I’m sure. Besides, just think of the French that are chasing us. Every misery we endure, they’re forced to share alike.”

Gillett spat onto the ground at the mention of the French. “Least there’s that,” he muttered. “Keeps me a little warmer, thinkin’ of them frogs shiverin’.”

Baxter groaned. “Most of them’s just like us, I bet—bein’ marched by their officers, just killin’ ‘cause they’re told. I’d be happier, me, if they left us alone and went off to one of their colonies for the holidays. Hear it’s nice in the Indies this time of year.”

“The French are not *really* like us though, are they?”

This observation came from a man just behind Gillett, surprising the lot of them. Albert turned his head and frowned as he focussed on the speaker.

It was Wilder—or at least, Albert *thought* that was the man’s surname. The soldier had joined their regiment only recently, after one of the more devastating attacks on the army’s retreating flank. Wilder was easily the most peculiar among their current ranks; though he was probably around Albert’s age, his face had a young, ageless quality to it that never seemed diminished by the cold and misery. Wilder’s once-red coat was just as stained and battered as everyone else’s, but he wore it with a strange nobility that made him seem more like an officer than the run-of-the-mill grunt he really was.

“What do you mean by that, exactly?” Albert asked him curiously. “How are the French not like us? I mean... other than the obvious, that is.”

Wilder turned his head to consider Albert. “Why, they are evil, of course,” he replied. He said it so simply and so naturally that Albert couldn’t help but pause. The statement was no exaggeration—rather, Wilder spoke the words with utter seriousness, as though he were discussing some mythical monster from a faerie tale. “Perhaps the French do not *look* evil,” Wilder added. “But many terrible things in this world take on fair or mundane form. Faeries, for instance.”

Baxter shivered and crossed himself at the mention. Even Gillett slowed his pace for a moment, with discomfort showing on his features.

“I...” Albert started. He blinked slowly. “I don’t know that I ought to say this. But I fear that you are incorrect on this account, Wilder. The French are no more good or evil than we are, at least on a cosmic scale. God loves all His children, after all.”

Wilder narrowed his gaze at the words. This close, Albert saw that the man’s eyes were a peculiar molten reddish-gold that didn’t seem quite natural. Albert nearly followed Baxter’s lead and crossed himself at that uncanny stare—but he resisted the urge, just barely.

“I have heard it told over and over that the French are evil,” Wilder informed Albert coolly. “That they are in fact the cause of everything terrible in England. Now, you insist that they are *not* evil. I admit, Mr Lowe—that does seem strange to me.”

Albert reached up to rub at his forehead. Wilder, he thought, was an odd one. Albert was beginning to suspect that the poor man was ever-so-slightly touched in the head. "It is not so strange for human beings to search for an easy villain to blame for all their troubles," Albert told him. "We often lie to ourselves every bit as much as we lie to each other, in order to feel some comfort in hard times." He paused. "Do not mistake me—the French are a danger to everything we hold dear. But their defeat will not solve every English woe overnight."

Wilder's stare grew ever-darker at the words, and Albert shifted uncomfortably on his feet. "Lie?" Wilder asked. "What do you mean by *lie*, Mr Lowe?"

Baxter snorted. "What's this new joke?" he asked. "Are you havin' us on, Wilder?"

A look of consternation crossed Wilder's face at this. Albert suspected that Wilder was not, in fact, having them on.

"To lie is..." Albert trailed off, blinking quickly. He struggled to put together an explanation of the simple concept. "It is to say something untrue," he said finally. "For instance, er. I could say that the sky is green today." Albert gestured up towards the pale, wintery sky.

Wilder glanced up sharply, and Albert got the strangest feeling that the man truly expected to see a green sky. As his eyes focussed upward, however, he frowned with sudden uncertainty.

"...but the sky is not green, Mr Lowe," Wilder said slowly. The man's voice now held a thread of underlying fear.

Gillett guffawed. "No, no, Wilder," he assured the other man. "The sky's green, all right. You're just not seein' it proper—isn't that right, Bax?"

Albert shot Gillett a disapproving look. "The sky is *not* green," he assured Wilder. "And neither are the French pure evil."

"Elias," Wilder corrected him. Those molten gold eyes searched the sky—vainly, desperately hoping, Albert thought, to catch a glimpse of green. "My name is *Elias*, Mr Lowe. Wilder is simply the surname they gave me at the workhouse."

Albert sighed heavily. "Elias," he corrected himself. "You need not look so distressed. The French are not pure evil, but they are still our enemy. You need feel no guilt for killing them, for they would surely do the same to you if they could."

Albert would later reflect that he should have known better than to utter such prophetic words in the same conversation as the fickle Fair Folk. Surely, some nasty member of the Gentry had been listening in and had decided to fulfil his fateful observation.

The first shouts went up from behind them, further down the mountain trail. Shots rang out in quick succession—screams followed in the wake of each thundering echo.

Chaos erupted, as it always had done during the skirmishes at their back lines. Men fumbled for their muskets, loading up their ammunition. There was no room here for a proper firing line; Albert was not even certain he knew where to find the nearest superior officer, spread out as they were along the trail.

Baxter cursed. "An' still no ammo, me!" he hissed. "Bloody stupid supply lines!"

Albert cringed. "I'm out as well," he said. "I suppose they'd look down on us shooting off our ramrods, wouldn't they?"

"Blow my arm off that way anyway," Baxter muttered. But there was a hint of panic in his tone now, and Albert thought the man might be seriously considering the possibility.

Wilder—*Elias*, Albert corrected himself dimly—pulled out a pouch and tossed it towards Baxter. The other soldier blinked and caught it, with a dull clinking of lead. Baxter widened his eyes. The pouch must have been nearly full—but surely, *Elias* had been shooting Frenchmen with the rest of them until now?

"Have mine," *Elias* informed Baxter gravely. "And start loading your weapon." He grabbed Albert by the arm, dragging him back. "Head further up, Mr Lowe," *Elias* said. "We cannot have our surgeon taking a lead ball to the face."

Albert flushed at the suggestion. He did not like the way the other men protected him during danger—it made him feel cowardly, and he could not help but feel that his noble father would disapprove. Nonetheless, he stumbled up the trail, pulling his musket from his back in case of danger.

The French were growing talented at harrying their back lines. Much sooner than Albert would have liked, he heard the gunfire draw closer and saw the dirty blue of French uniforms flashing among the smoke. A musket ball whizzed past his shoulder, thudding into the rocks with a faint puff of dirt.

Elias kept a few paces behind Albert, with his posture straight and his uncanny golden eyes staring down through the smoke. Albert briefly fancied that the man

really *could* see everything that was happening, despite the haze. The other man's lips moved, but Albert could not quite make out the words that he murmured to himself.

Another *crack* sounded from below—and Elias staggered back, collapsing to the ground.

Albert rushed towards him, dropping to his knees. "Where are you hit?" he yelled urgently. The ruckus was now deafening; and at first, he thought that Elias might not have heard him, judging from the glazed look on his face. But Elias merely shook his head and muttered something.

"Louder!" Albert urged him. "Where. Are. You. Hit?"

Elias blinked at him slowly. "I was not hit," he said. This time, when he spoke, it was soft, and calm, and measured—but somehow, the words wove their way perfectly through the din to settle next to Albert's ear.

Albert knitted his brow. *He's in shock*, he thought. He started pulling at Elias' jacket, searching for spots of blood.

Elias tugged himself away from Albert's hands, struggling to rise to his feet. "I was not hit," he repeated, in that soft, eerie tone. "And the sky is not green, Mr Lowe. I do not know how to lie—do you understand?"

A cry went up nearby, and Elias jerked his gaze before them. A figure resolved from out of the smoke—blue-jacketed, and not red. Albert had only long enough to note the musket in the Frenchman's hands, pointed directly at them, before the gun went off.

What happened next, he later found it very difficult to explain.

Elias threw up his arm and breathed out a word. It was not a word that Albert had ever heard before—and he counted himself a very fine linguist indeed, with an ability in French, Latin, and Spanish, at least. It was a word that made the world around them tremble; it somehow made the rocks *clitter-clack* in fear.

The smoky haze before them solidified into a serpentine form, which opened now its reddish-gold eyes and hissed at the Frenchman. The musket ball which should have found its way to Elias and Albert had thudded instead into the serpent; now, it clattered uselessly to the ground. The smoky creature struck at the French soldier with alarming speed, snapping its jaws closed upon his shoulder.

The Frenchman screamed—in mortal terror as much as in pain, Albert was

sure. The serpent reared up, dragging the enemy soldier up off his feet and tossing him away down the mountainside like only so much rubbish.

Elias looked away uncomfortably.

The serpent in the smoke roiled and hissed again—and then, it darted away, searching for new French prey.

Albert stared at Elias, his mouth agape. He knew that he needed to get up—that there were surely injured men he needed to see—but the sheer unreality of the situation had yet to wear off.

Elias reached down to grasp Albert's arm, tugging him back up to his feet.

"You are a magician," Albert whispered.

Elias did not reply. It occurred to Albert that if Elias *did* reply, he might be forced to admit the truth. *I do not know how to lie*, he had said.

But soon, Elias too had disappeared into the smoke, following in the wake of his unearthly serpent.

"Surgeon!" a man screamed from below. "Find the surgeon!"

Albert did not have time to ponder further.



THE BUTCHER'S bill was smaller than it ought have been.

Albert knew it, even as he rushed to treat what injured came his way. Baxter had taken a ball to the leg; thankfully, it hadn't hit anything vital, but the man was going to be limping even more slowly than usual from now on. Albert did not voice aloud his real worry: if the wound became infected, the leg would almost surely need to come off.

"Mr Lowe!" Lieutenant Banks barked at Albert as he approached. "Any casualties this time?" There was a weary note beneath the question.

"There were a few, I hear," Albert admitted. "I have not been to the back yet. But I know that one or two men fell in the initial ambush."

Lieutenant Banks grimaced. "More than that, I'd expect," he said.

"Maybe not," Albert replied slowly. "The French retreated quite abruptly this time." He was just considering how to broach the subject of strange Elias Wilder and his magic when he heard Gillett exclaiming on his way up the trail towards them.

“—wanderin’ around without your gun out!” Gillett spat. “Next time, mark my words, the rest of us won’t save your miserable arse!”

Gillett’s features twisted with incredulous rage as he berated Elias, next to him. Elias, for his part, did not seem inclined to take the matter seriously. Indeed, Albert had begun to suspect that Elias did not require the gun that he had been given, and that he had not, in fact, been using it at all.

Lieutenant Banks straightened sharply. “What’s this now?” he demanded.

Gillett froze. Angry as he was, Albert suspected that Gillett did not intend to get his fellow soldier punished. “Small misunderstandin’, sir,” he stammered. “We’ll handle it, sir, don’t you worry. Plenty else to worry about, I’d bet.”

Lieutenant Banks narrowed his eyes. “Have you been derelict of duty, Wilder?” he asked archly.

Elias glanced up at the lieutenant. His golden eyes were hard and unimpressed. “I have killed at least three Frenchmen today, sir,” he informed Lieutenant Banks.

Gillett whirled on Elias. “The hell you have!” he said. “Can’t kill a man without your gun out, Wilder!” Whatever mild generosity Gillett had been clinging to before now disappeared like so much smoke on the battlefield.

“He has killed many men, I am sure,” Albert interjected abruptly. He glanced over towards the lieutenant. “I saw it with my own eyes, sir. Elias—I mean, Wilder—he used some dire magic to drive away the French. It is because of him that they fled.”

Lieutenant Banks blinked slowly at this. Albert could tell that the lieutenant was fighting against the urge to call him a liar, and so he added: “On my word, and on my family’s honour. I am Lord Carroway’s son, as well you know. I swear to you, Elias Wilder is a magician, and he has saved more than one of us today.”

Elias turned those golden eyes upon Albert now, and the look within them was not friendly. Rather, there was a hint of betrayal, and a sense of tired resignation.

Lieutenant Banks let out a long breath. He settled his hard gaze upon Elias. “Well,” he said. Then, with another breath: “*Well.*”

Gillett stared at Elias. Slowly, he took a step back from the other man.

“I shall have to report this up the chain,” said Lieutenant Banks. He jerked his chin at Elias. “Come with me, Wilder.”

Elias climbed the trail in silence, keeping his eyes to the ground. Albert felt a

mild stab of guilt as Elias passed him, though he wasn't sure just why he ought to feel that way. *Surely*, Albert thought, *they'll give him a commendation for this.*

"Thank you," Albert murmured to Elias, before he had gone too far ahead.

Elias said nothing in return—but Albert thought, perhaps, that he saw the man nod.

CHAPTER 2



Elias did not return to the back lines that evening. Nor, in fact, did Albert see him at all for the next few weeks.

It was only once they had reached Portugal and settled in for the winter that Albert heard the rumours.

“The regiment’s magician took on an assistant magician,” Baxter muttered to Albert one evening, as a few of them sat down to mend their coats. “Some raw talent from the common recruits. Wonder who *that* might be?”

“I cannot imagine that magicians are so common on the ground,” Albert admitted. “Still... it has occurred to me that Elias must have been hiding his magic for a purpose. I begin to fear that I repaid his help with a poor turn.”

“Poor turn for him, maybe,” Baxter snorted. “Better for us. We need more magicians, an’ that’s a fact. I heard Napoleon’s Lord Sorcier is skulkin’ around battlefields again. You know what they say happened in Corunna.”

Albert considered this grimly. The Battle of Corunna had been before his deployment. By all accounts, it had been an utter rout for the English. Surely, there were other factors at work than just Napoleon’s infamous Lord Sorcier... but some said that the French magician had whipped up a literal hurricane to chase the English out of Spain. It was rare that the Lord Sorcier took a direct hand in things—but the knowledge of his presence hung persistently upon them all, like a heavy, ominous cloak.

"I very much doubt they will set our assistant magician against the Lord Sorcier himself," Albert observed. "But perhaps Elias will free up Magician Lilley to focus more upon the matter."

Baxter shook his head at that. "*Lilley*," he muttered. "Not sure whether he's more a threat to us than the Lord Sorcier sometimes."

Albert decided it was best if he pretended not to hear this comment.

The next time Albert saw Elias Wilder, it was at a dinner table, surrounded by officers. Albert's family connections and his status as a gentleman often resulted in dinner invitations when the fighting was less pressing. So it was that he found himself in a local mansion in Lisbon, which had been politely co-opted for the housing of several English officers.

Elias was not himself commissioned, but he seemed to have been assigned as Magician Lilley's constant shadow. Next to the older, more distinguished gentleman, Elias could not help but appear shabby, and Albert marvelled at the change this comparison made in his estimation of Elias' bearing. Where once Albert had thought the man strangely dignified, he now saw only a tired young man in a messy, patched-up uniform.

Elias did, however, know precisely how to follow proper table manners. Even as Albert headed in to find a seat, he saw the new assistant magician select the proper fork for the current course. *Perhaps Magician Lilley has been teaching Elias other things than magic*, Albert thought idly.

"Ah, Lieutenant!" Magician Lilley greeted them, as Lieutenant Banks strode ahead of Albert. "Sit down, sit down. We were just discussing Spain. I hazard we'll be returning right to it in the spring, won't we? What do you think?"

Lieutenant Banks settled in at the table, and Albert quietly followed suit. "I think I dare not speculate," the lieutenant said, with a stony face. "For every time I have tried, I have ended up wildly mistaken."

Magician Lilley chortled at this and pounded his palm on the table. "Good man," he said. "Leave the planning to the upper ranks. More trouble for them and less for us."

"Better to speculate on one's own area of expertise, isn't it?" asked a captain down the table. "What odds would you put on yourself against the Lord Sorcier if he should show up at the next battle, Magician?"

Perhaps it was only Albert's imagination, but he thought he saw Magician

Lilley pale at the suggestion. The magician forced a smile, even as Elias cast him a sideways glance from the chair next to him. "Stories of the Lord Sorcier are overblown, most certainly," Lilley assured the table. "No magician on this earth could call up a proper hurricane. It's all poppycock and exaggeration. The troops gossip as badly as a bunch of housewives."

"I beg your pardon," Elias cut in suddenly. "But you are incorrect, Magician Lilley."

Heads turned up and down the table. Lilley blinked at his assistant magician, briefly stunned by the lapse in decorum. "Excuse me, Wilder," he said. "I could swear I just heard you evince a magical opinion. You *are* aware that you're not even a full magician?"

Elias arched one contemptuous eyebrow. "A superior rank does not give one license to lie outrageously," he said. Elias fixed his golden eyes upon Albert as he said the words, and Albert wondered if the strange man had finally figured out the nature of a lie. "A powerful enough magician *could* call up a hurricane," Elias continued. "Rather, they would summon up a dangerous creature—an elemental, or a member of the Gentry—and request the favour in return for some dreadful payment."

Lilley's face went beet red. He sputtered soundlessly for a moment, grasping for a response. It was clear that he could not deny the accuracy of the statement, however—for when he finally settled on an answer, it was merely this: "*Insubordinate! Out! Get out, I mean to say!*"

Elias pushed out his chair and rose to his feet. He bowed stiffly to the gathering and headed for the door.

There was a hard tension in Elias' manner that Albert could not quite interpret. So it was that after a few minutes of eating, Albert rose and politely excused himself, claiming some minute duty to attend.

Albert caught up with the assistant magician only by pure luck, on his way back to their temporary barracks. Elias had paused in the street, staring up at the sky in the same way that he had done in the mountains. As Albert caught up to him, the assistant magician spoke, with his eyes still cast towards the heavens.

"The sky is green today, Mr Lowe," Elias said. "At least, so far as Magician Lilley is concerned."

Albert startled at that. "I'm not sure that I understand," he said.

Elias turned to face him directly. "Magician Lilley is a hack," he informed Albert. "I am not sure whether he truly believes himself to be better than he is, or whether he is putting on a conscious show for everyone else. Either way, he is lying to *someone*."

Albert shivered. Though he had just heard Elias tell an outright lie about a green sky, he did not suppose that the man was lying about *this*. "I have seen Magician Lilley doing magic before," Albert said weakly. "He must have *some* skill."

Elias shook his head. "Some skill," he agreed. "Parlour tricks, cleverly inflated to seem more useful and more powerful than they are. His practical knowledge is lacking. The Lord Sorcier would murder him in a heartbeat."

Albert took a deep breath. "I am not sure what all there is to do about the matter," he said. "Magician Lilley was properly commissioned. As far as the regiment is concerned, he is our authority on magic. Worse—we have so few magicians at all, the other regiments probably ask his advice as well."

Elias pressed his fingers to his forehead. Somewhere in between the dinner and their meeting on the street, the assistant magician had regained his otherworldly dignity. Perhaps it was simply that he no longer stood in comparison to all those officers in their neat neckcloths and clean clothing. Perhaps it was a trick of the light. Or perhaps, Albert thought, it was something purposeful.

"I am no longer sure that this is my fight," Elias admitted softly.

Albert blinked. "Is it not?" he asked. "You are an Englishman, and you have taken the king's shilling."

Elias frowned. "I am not *sure* that I am an Englishman," he said. "No one has ever told me as much. And certainly, all of the workhouse masters were in a hurry to be rid of me. If I do not have a home anywhere in England, Mr Lowe, does that still make me an Englishman?"

Albert shifted his posture uncomfortably. "I am sorry that you were ever in the workhouses," he said. "I volunteered among them, before I left. They are a dirty shame upon our country, to be sure."

Elias pressed his arms behind his back, contemplating. "I asked why the workhouses were so terrible, Mr Lowe," he said. "I was told that it was all to do with the taxes, and the war, and the evil French behind it all. But even if I killed the Lord

Sorcier himself tomorrow, none of it would change, would it? The French are not evil. That was a lie. I am not sure that I can see the point in all of this now.”

Albert hesitated. “I do not know that I have any right to dissuade you,” he admitted, “though desertion is indeed a terrible crime. But there is a point to all of this, at least for me.” He smiled helplessly. “I send letters back home to my mother, as often as I might. I think of her, and of my father and my brothers, and how desperately I wish to keep them safe. I fear what things Napoleon and his Empire might do to them, if we cannot stem this tide.”

Elias’ features clouded with puzzlement as Albert spoke.

“You love your family, then?” Elias asked. He seemed confused by the idea—as confused as he had been by the very concept of lying.

“Of course I love my family,” Albert said with astonishment. “They are the very best people that I know. I’m surprised that you—ah.” He coloured with embarrassment. “I am so sorry. You were in the workhouses. You do not have a family, then?”

Elias frowned darkly. “I had one once, I suppose,” he said. “There was no love there. Dare I ask... is it *normal* to love one’s family?”

Albert cringed. “I daresay that it is,” he told the assistant magician, with a hint of apology in his tone.

Elias nodded brusquely. “I see,” he said. “I shall have to take this all in mind, Mr Lowe. Thank you for your input.”

Albert sighed. “You may call me Albert, if you like,” he said. “For however long you remain, that is.”

Elias smiled at this. It was the first time Albert had seen the expression on his face. The change it made in him was something to behold; Albert was sorry that he was the only one present to see it.

“Thank you, Albert,” Elias said.

He turned back down the street again and continued walking. As Elias disappeared around a corner, Albert wondered dimly if he would ever see the man again.

CHAPTER 3



Albert did not hear any rumours that the assistant magician had deserted in the night, which he hoped to be a good sign. Nonetheless, he had little time to worry over the matter. As spring made itself known, the English army did indeed make its way back past the Lines of Torres Vedras, into Spain and towards Vitoria.

It was no leap of logic to assume that there would be a terrible battle at Vitoria. The French were attempting to pull themselves back to France; Wellington, of course, did not intend to let them get there.

Albert's regiment was assigned to a column of *many* regiments, meant to cut across Monte Arrato and strike the river to the east. He would later remember that the bridge fell much too easily to their advance. He remembered very clearly pushing his way across the bridge with his fellows—and then, for a moment, he looked out over the river in instinctive dread.

Water hissed and roared... and then, the Zadorra River overran its banks.

Albert had only the briefest impression of a white, frothing bull charging out from the river rapids, before the torrent rose up to greet them. He was swept so instantly off the bridge that he lost all sense of place or direction, dragged beneath the surface of the water.

There was no help for it, really—that was the worst part. As frantically as he kicked and swam, the river itself seemed to churn against him, pressing its weight

upon his efforts. Albert struggled against the current, searching for something solid to grasp. At one point, he found another man's hand and tried to hold on; but whoever it was, they were both swept away from one another in short order, pulled back into the deliberate chaos of the river.

If these are my last moments, Albert thought distantly, I should spend them thinking of something pleasant, at least.

He thought of his mother, sitting back at home with her embroidery, sipping at tea and thinking of him back. Lady Carroway had a terrible singing voice, much to her chagrin—but Albert had always loved to listen to her hum.

He was just trying to call to mind the last tune he had heard from her when the river suddenly spat him back up.

Albert blinked away the murk in his eyes, coughing up water roughly. All around him, he heard others doing the same as they crawled across the shore.

The rest of the regiment—those who had not been caught by the strange torrent—remained upon the foot of the bridge, holding their position. The frothing water-bull seethed upon the other side of the bridge, staring down some unseen figure within the regiment. For a moment longer, it twisted and writhed, straining against the unseen power that had caught it. Then, with a last loud roar—it winked away entirely.

Bright golden fire kindled upon the bridge. Albert could not see the source—but he greatly suspected that the figure beneath the flames was a dirty, ragged-looking assistant magician.

Albert struggled quickly back to his feet, gauging the distance back to the bridge. The bull's charge had scattered more than half the regiment; some of them now staggered back the way they'd come, hurrying to rejoin their fellows. Albert followed them in a cloudy haze.

The vision that swam into view as he approached the bridge was both breathtaking and terrible to behold. The rest of the soldiers had given Elias a wide, respectful berth as he lit into the enemy. French soldiers screamed and burned, backpedalling helplessly from the threat. The assistant magician wore a grim, methodical expression that Albert knew quite well; it was the expression Albert normally wore himself, when he cut away another man's limb. The horror before them was absolutely, surgically necessary... and also deeply ugly.

Thunder rolled across the battlefield. At first, Albert thought a storm had

come from the clear blue sky—but as dirt flew and men cried out, he realised that the French had opened cannon fire on the bridge.

The golden beacon of fire winked out, just as abruptly as it had appeared.

Albert rushed the rest of the way up towards the bridge. “Surgeon!” someone yelled, in a familiar refrain. “Someone save the damned magician!”

“Surgeon!” Albert yelled back, shoving his way through the panicking soldiers. “I mean—I *am* a surgeon! Move, you lot!”

Someone grabbed him by the elbow, dragging him along. Another soldier shoved him forward, nearly banging his nose against another man’s back. Finally, Albert found himself ejected into the centre of a defensive circle, where men had formed up to protect one injured man in particular.

Elias was on his back, screaming like the Furies themselves had come to claim his soul.

Albert fell to his knees, scrambling to grab hold of the other man. Elias barely seemed to notice Albert’s presence—his golden eyes were wide and dazed with agony, and his back was arched in pain. The assistant magician could not seem to halt his thrashing, even as Albert begged him to hold still and let him work.

“Grab him!” Albert snapped to the others. “Someone hold him down, for God’s sake!”

A few of the nearby soldiers complied. Two fully grown men grabbed each of his arms, while another sat heavily upon his legs. At first, Albert wasn’t certain what had caused the ugly screaming. But soon, his eyes alighted upon two spots of blood: one on the magician’s right arm and one at his shoulder. Even as he watched, the blood began to spread like water—but worse by far was the way the injuries seemed to *burn*.

Albert stared in horrified fascination. *Is this some spell?* he wondered. *Will it hurt me too, if I try to pull the pieces out?*

He knew he had no time to consider the consequences. In the end, it was barely a choice at all.

Albert pulled his surgeon’s knife and dug it into Elias’ shoulder, where the bigger piece of shrapnel had lodged. So agonised was the magician that he barely screamed any louder at all, as Albert dug the twisted piece of iron from his shoulder.

It's only grapeshot, Albert thought in astonishment. But this isn't magical at all!

Albert moved quickly to the shrapnel in the magician's arm, prying it loose with an embarrassing lack of delicacy. As the other barb came free, Elias choked off his last scream... and his eyes began to roll back into his head.

Albert slapped him urgently across the cheek. "Don't faint!" he yelled. "Not now, *certainly* not now!"

Elias focussed hazily upon Albert. His body still trembled, and his breathing was laboured. "It's gone?" he asked hoarsely. He sounded bewildered.

"The grapeshot?" Albert asked, as he bandaged up the magician's injuries. "All that I could find. You're not burning anymore, at least."

Elias grasped at Albert's arm and struggled back to his feet. He had to lean for a long moment upon the surgeon in order to steady himself. Men cheered around them, even as the ghastly sound of cannon fire continued.

"Iron," Elias rasped at Albert, in a voice so low that it was nearly lost among the din of the battle. "Magic cannot block iron, Albert—and I must not be pierced by it. Do you understand?"

Albert nodded, though he wasn't entirely sure how he might prevent the matter. *I suppose I must simply dig the iron out again, if it happens once more,* he thought.

The French had rushed in to take advantage of the confusion; Albert saw their firing line on the other side of the bridge. But that golden bonfire reasserted itself soon enough... and the French soon had cause to regret their eager approach.

Albert cringed away from the sight. It was cowardly of him, he knew. But men were not meant to burn.

He stood as part of the defensive circle around their assistant magician, and selfishly hoped that no one would call upon him to kill any more men.



IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG for them to retake the bridge, with their assistant magician recovered.

"We must find the Lord Sorcier," Elias ground out in a hoarse voice, once they

had solidified their position. "It was he who sent the water elemental. Now he knows where I am, but I do not know where *he* is."

Albert startled at this. After that horrid display of sorcerous might, it had been easy to forget that there was a man of flesh and blood at the centre of it all. He turned towards Elias, knowing that his face was pale and his features uncertain.

Some part of him had expected to see a monster where the assistant magician once stood. But there was only Elias, with his beaten, bloodstained uniform and his strange, weary dignity.

Albert's mind caught up to the magician's words belatedly. "If the Lord Sorcier was the one who sent the water elemental," he said slowly, "then wouldn't the *elemental* know where he is?"

Elias blinked hazily. "Quite right, Albert," he mumbled. "Why did I not think of that?"

Albert considered the injuries that still bled sluggishly through the bandages on Elias' arm. "I suspect you could claim mitigating circumstances," he observed.

Elias raised his good arm again and flung his palm out towards the river. Men jumped and cried out as the water-bull rose sulkily from the depths. It was a dirty, growling beast of brown water and surging debris. It stretched and groaned, rising into the sky above them, as though to assert its power.

It had no eyes, Albert noted distantly. Where a normal bull might have had a head, there was only a round, churning void of water.

"Your summoner," Elias ground out. "Take me to him."

The water-bull twisted and burbled, thrashing against the magician's control. The Zadorra River seethed with such obvious hatred that Albert wondered if it knew the foreign nature of its assailant. But presently, the beast settled into a reluctant sort of submission—and, in a whirl of frothy water, it turned upon the shore.

Elias started after the elemental. Albert made to join him, and the magician paused in confusion. "What are you doing?" Elias asked.

"I am coming with you," Albert said helpfully. "To be sure you are not pierced by you-know-what."

Elias quirked his lips into a distant sort of grin. "Ah yes," he said. "Well. Do me a favour and don't get killed, Albert."

"I had not planned to die, Elias," Albert told him mildly. "But I shall do you the

favour regardless, I suppose.” He pulled his musket off his shoulder, surprised that it had survived his sojourn in the water. The whole of the gun was doused, though, and Albert stopped to switch another soldier for a properly dry weapon. Since he was walking in the company of the regiment’s assistant magician, the gun’s true owner did not protest the matter.

“Dare I ask what happened to our fully ranked magician, Elias?” Albert asked, as they shoved their way through the ranks towards the far shore.

“Magician Lilley awoke quite mad today,” Elias said. “He was stomping and neighing like a pony. In fact, I believe he may have tried to steal oats from the lieutenant’s horse.”

Albert blinked in alarm. “What on earth could cause such an affliction?” he asked.

Elias considered this. “Many things,” he said. “Many things *could* cause such an affliction. But perhaps it is most closely related to the gentleman magician’s insistence that I be whipped and discharged for my latest insolence.”

Albert gaped at him. “Did we not need him for the battle, Elias?” he asked.

“I daresay not,” Elias replied. “Perhaps if the Lord Sorcier is vulnerable to card tricks.” He paused. “In any event, I suspect that Magician Lilley’s case shall miraculously resolve itself upon the morning. These things do tend to cure themselves with the next rising of the sun.”

The giant, watery elemental waited for them at the far end of the shore. As they came to face it, Albert lost what little humour he’d regained. The faceless thing still frothed like an angry cauldron—and this time, Albert swore that it had looked his way with the eyes that it did not have. He became keenly aware that the only thing which stood between him and another mortal encounter with the Zadorra River was whatever invisible magic Elias had employed to stay the creature’s temper.

Elias made another sharp gesture, however—and the elemental sloshed away from the river like a great wave, rushing along the trampled green fields beyond.

Albert and Elias had to hurry to keep up with it. More than once, Albert saw the assistant magician exert his control to slow the creature’s impatient speed. A not-insignificant chunk of the regiment cheered and followed along after them, when it was realised that the magician had stolen the enemy’s unearthly ally.

“The French are pulling back,” Elias observed breathlessly, as they stumbled

along. "Where do you think they are going?"

Albert frowned. "I heard the lieutenant mention a village in that direction," he said. "Perhaps the French are hoping to set up defences there. Do you think the Lord Sorcier is with that contingent?"

"The elemental seems to be taking us in that direction," Elias said. He drew in a few more ragged breaths before he could continue. "I think I know how we might draw him out."

The elemental sped up suddenly, as though taking some silent cue. As it ran ahead of them towards the French lines, the enemy soldiers yelled and fired upon it. Their ammunition did nothing to slow the creature, however, and it soon became clear that it would wash over the hapless French like a tidal wave.

Just as the elemental rose to crash upon their ranks, it seized up and wavered in place.

At the same moment, Elias stumbled, and Albert had to reach out to catch him.

A single figure stepped forth from the French soldiers to confront the water-bull. Albert presumed this to be the Lord Sorcier—and indeed, the man was wearing a French officer's uniform, with gold epaulettes upon his shoulders.

The French paused their withdrawal, unwilling to abandon their magician. But Albert and Elias had caught up to their retreat, and the English soldiers with them ran ahead to engage the enemy army. Musket fire popped unevenly across the battlefield, and smoke rose up around them.

Elias had begun to struggle. Albert felt it in his slowed movement; he saw it in the assistant magician's flickering golden eyes. Elias kept his gaze fixed upon the elemental as he stumbled across the battlefield on Albert's shoulder. His body trembled with some heavy struggle, and Albert realised that the Lord Sorcier was contesting his grip upon the elemental.

Albert hauled Elias through the thick, confusing smoke, following his mumbled directions. Though the way was unclear, Elias always seemed to know the direction of the creature he controlled. Ragged soldiers stumbled through the smoke like ghosts—more than once, Albert lifted his musket to shoot at a phantom in a blue uniform, before he remembered how badly he needed to hold his shot for the magician they had come to confront. Thankfully, the confusion was absolute, and none of the French ever came close enough to see them pass.

And then, they emerged from the smoke—so close to the elemental that

muddy water spattered upon Albert's face.

There, on the other side of the water-bull, stood the Lord Sorcier himself.

Albert stared at him, suddenly taken aback.

The Lord Sorcier was wearing a fine officer's uniform. That much, Albert had expected. But the enemy magician was a very young man indeed—much younger than Albert himself. His long brown hair was pulled back into a ponytail, but the ends of it had been badly singed. Dirt and weariness and misery marred his smooth features.

Is this the man who brought a hurricane down upon Corunna? Albert wondered. Is this the man who commanded the Zadorra River to kill me?

He could not fathom it, suddenly. The Lord Sorcier could not possibly have been older than his youngest brother.

Shouts cut through the haze of Albert's surprise—and he realised belatedly that the French had left soldiers on guard for the Lord Sorcier, just as Albert had taken it upon himself to guard Elias. One of the French soldiers brought up his gun. Albert followed suit before he could think better of it. Both muskets fired—but only Albert's found its mark. The French soldier toppled over like a rag doll.

A few of the nearby English soldiers noticed the altercation, even among the smoke. Men shouted and ran—and a dangerous battle soon began around the two magicians.

Albert fumbled to reload his musket, cursing himself for the impulsive shot. The Lord Sorcier looked sharply over towards him—or rather, Albert thought, towards *Elias*. The French magician widened his eyes with a strange sort of horror, and he let out an exclamation in French.

"Sainte mère de Dieu!" the young man cried out. *"Les Anglais ont pactisé avec un être féérique!"*

Mother of God, Albert translated in his head. *The English have bargained with a faerie.*

Surely, he had heard the man incorrectly?

But no. The Lord Sorcier's features now revealed a fear that transcended all language.

Elias leaned heavily upon Albert's shoulder, groaning with exertion as he fought against the elemental's fury. "What.. what has he said?" Elias asked. "Do you know, Albert? I am terrible at French."

Albert stared at him, unable to speak.

Have we really bargained with a faerie? Albert thought. *Is that what we have done?*

"It probably doesn't matter," Elias mumbled.

The assistant magician was flagging dangerously. He had lost more blood in their advance; Albert could see it staining through the bandages more and more. Elias' grip on the elemental wavered, and it turned slowly in place, looming ominously over them. Albert felt its seething, furious glee as it became aware of its impending freedom.

Another musket ball whizzed past his ear; the wind of it cut him, so that he wondered for a moment whether it had actually hit him. The urgency of the situation flooded back full-force, and Albert made a fateful decision all at once.

"Elias," Albert said. "Are all magicians vulnerable to iron?"

Elias gave a rattling breath. "Yes," he managed. "All."

Albert abandoned his attempt to reload his musket. Instead, he left the iron ramrod inside the barrel, and he pushed Elias away from himself.

This, he thought, is a terrible idea. But at least it is an idea.

Albert lifted his musket up to his shoulder. He took aim at the young Lord Sorcier—and he pulled the trigger.

There was a hot flash, and a loud bang. Fiery agony lanced through Albert's arm. In the next moment, he realised that he was on the ground, on his back, staring up at the sky.

There was a ringing in his ears—so loud that he was not sure anymore whether the surrounding screams came from the English or the French. A roar of water echoed through the air...

...but the water did not crash down upon the English.

Albert rolled his neck to stare dazedly at his hand, even as a small voice in his head advised that he should not. There were fingers missing, he saw, and the whole of his forearm looked simply mangled.

The sight of it overcame him—not because he had never seen anything like it before, but because it was his *own* hand and his *own* arm.

Just before he passed out, he thought he might have heard Elias calling his name.

CHAPTER 4



Albert swam in and out of consciousness several times. It was hard to keep the time, of course, but it felt something like an eternity. If Albert had been aware enough to think coherent thoughts, he might have found this to be a good sign; after all, if the English had lost, he probably would not have lived long enough to suffer.

“—very best surgeon?” he thought he heard Elias demand. “Go and get him, by God!”

“That’d be Guthrie, sir!” a voice responded, with a surprising amount of respect. “I’ll go and fetch him, sir!”

Time was strange and distended—but the next that Albert knew, there was a fresh, horrendous pain in his arm, even worse than the pain that had gone before. Surely, it was the *worst* pain that he had ever suffered in his life, and he would later be ashamed to admit how much he screamed.

“You are not allowed to die, Mr Lowe,” he heard Elias say. “I only stayed in this awful mire in order to send you home safely to your family, do you understand? If you spoil that for me, then I shall be very cross indeed!”

Is that the terrible bargain which I made with a faerie? Albert wondered dimly. *How very strange.*

But somehow, the knowledge that Albert must not cross the faerie that had saved him kept him stubbornly clinging to life and awareness.

It was an interminable aeon of pain and delirium before Albert finally came back to full consciousness. When he did, he was surprised to find himself in a proper bed, in a proper little house. Sunlight poured in through a nearby window; one of the young boys who served as an officer's aide sat next to Albert's bed, staring down at him with curiosity.

"Did—" Albert coughed on the words, feeling dazed. "Did we win, then?"

The boy laughed. "Was a total rout, sir!" he said. "For the French, I mean! They couldn't run themselves back to France nearly fast enough, once their Lord Sorcier died!"

Albert blinked slowly. He glanced instinctively down at his arm and winced as he saw only a bandaged stump.

Ah well, Albert thought. *I have cut away so many other men's limbs that perhaps I deserve it done to me.*

The boy shoved a flask towards him, with a sympathetic look in his eyes. "Magician-general's orders, sir," he said. "You're to have a victory drink."

Albert took the flask with his good hand and choked down a swallow. The alcohol burned pleasantly as it went down. A moment later, he processed the boy's words.

"The magician-general?" Albert asked, bewildered. "Do we have one of those?"

"We do now, by God!" the boy said proudly. "Wellington created him an office on the spot, after he put down the dread Lord Sorcier!"

Albert's mind slowly formed connections. "You mean to say that... Elias Wilder is now our ranking magician?" he asked.

"Yes sir!" the aide told him. "The rest of the army's gone on, but the magician-general left me with orders to see to you. You're headed home, a'course, as soon as you can travel."

"Ah," Albert said. The suggestion seemed unreal, somehow. After all of the cold nights and trudging misery, Albert should have been thrilled at the prospect of returning to a safe home and a regular bed. But though he had apparently helped to turn the tide of battle, he could not help the stab of deep, dark shame that occurred at the idea that he'd lost the ability to fight.

"Would you tell me all about the battle?" the boy asked eagerly. "You was there, right next to that Lord Sorcier, wasn't you?"

Albert coughed. "If you'll search me out another drink," he said, "I will be happy to tell you what I can."



NOTHING AT HOME felt as real as it once had.

Albert had expected that the world would slide back into place as soon as he stepped foot back in England. Surely, he thought, the sight of his family would soothe him, and his old familiar bed at Carroway House in London would give him leave to dream away the horrors of war.

But though Albert's mother cried joyful tears to see him and his father held him close, his youngest brother hurried over with a great big smile on his face—and Albert became aware of a sick, hollow place in his chest that he knew no bed could ever fill.

Of all things, Elias Wilder should have been the thing that he forgot. Compared to the blood and the surgeries and the awful cries of the dying, the assistant magician felt less consequential and more unreal, the longer that Albert tarried in England. But every once in a while, Albert would hear the maids gossiping about the magician-general, still fighting in France, and he would pause and remember that a very real faerie had saved his life, on the condition that he should come back to his family.

At those times, Albert wondered whether he had actually fulfilled his promise. *Perhaps I will wake upon the battlefield at any moment*, he thought idly. *Perhaps I am still in Vitoria, drowning in the Zadorra River.*

But one could not live one's life expecting to wake at any moment. And so, Albert shoved these thoughts aside and smiled at his mother and allowed himself to enjoy the awful sound of her off-key humming.

The dream did not end, somehow, until that fateful day one year later, when Elias Wilder finally reappeared.

He did so in his usual unusual manner, of course: Carroway House's butler hurried into the morning room one day, sputtering that a man without a calling card had shown up at the door, insisting to see Albert. "He is not even dressed to call!" the butler fumed. "He said that he served with you in the war, Mr Albert, and that if I did not fetch you, he would turn me into a frog!"

Albert considered this statement carefully, turning it around in his mind and examining it from several angles.

Ah, he thought suddenly. This is real. I am in England, and Elias Wilder has come to call.

Albert broke out into a smile. "Please show him in," he said. "And... could I trouble you for a fresh pot of tea?"

The butler shot Albert an odd look at that—but he nodded once and hurried off to fulfil the request. Soon, he returned to let a man into the morning room—a familiar fellow in sturdy, unremarkable dress and very comfortable-looking boots.

It only made sense that Albert's world had changed so greatly, while Elias Wilder had not changed at all. Another full year of war had somehow failed to etch a single line upon the other man's face. Still, Albert thought, there was a heaviness about the pale man's shoulders that had not been there before—and now that Elias' hair was not so dirty, Albert could see that it was a very fine white-blond that did not seem quite natural.

Elias paused in the doorway. A frown flickered across his delicate features as Albert stood up slowly to greet him.

And these were the first words that the magician said, after an entire year of absence:

"You are still missing an arm?"

Albert smiled. The ridiculous statement felt warm and familiar, somehow. It was entirely too strange to be a dream.

"Hello to you as well," Albert said cheerfully. He offered out his remaining arm to shake hands. "I hear that you have earned yourself some commendations."

Elias scowled at this and allowed the matter of Albert's missing arm to pass. "Commendations are cheap," he said. "It is a simple matter to give a man a medal and tell him he has done a good job." Still, he sat down when Albert indicated a chair. "I must apologise," the magician added briskly. "You should have had a commendation yourself. I allowed a great many people to believe that it was I who killed the Lord Sorcier. I hoped that it would put them into such a fear that they would listen to me when I forced them to attend your injuries in a hurry."

Albert broadened his smile. "I am sure that you did not *lie* to anyone about it," he said. "Not directly, at least."

He paused as a maid came in to refresh the tea and pour them both a cup. She edged towards the wall, as though to stay and serve, but Albert shooed her gently away. The maids in his mother's household had signed on to serve idle nobles, and not faeries—he was sure that the woman would be horrified if she'd known his visitor's true identity.

The maid departed, and the room fell once more into silence. Finally, Albert cleared his throat. "You have nothing to apologise for, of course," he told Elias. "You surely saved my life."

Elias glanced away uncomfortably at this. "Have we not saved each other's lives?" he asked. "I admit, I have lost track of the tally. That would be a deadly mistake, if I were... elsewhere."

In faerie, Albert thought silently. But he had learned his lesson since the day that he had first outed Elias as a magician—it was clear that the man did not wish to discuss his heritage, and so Albert pretended to overlook the lapse.

"When you lose track of the tally," Albert told Elias gravely, "I suspect that means that you have become friends."

Elias blinked at this. "Oh," he said. A thoughtful look flickered across his face. "Are we friends then, Albert?"

"I am certainly *your* friend," Albert replied. "I suppose you must decide if you are mine, since I cannot decide the matter for you."

Elias smiled. It was one of those oddly enchanting smiles which so rarely graced his features. "I am your friend, then," he said softly. "And I am so very pleased to see you at home with your family."

Albert nodded at this. It seemed only natural, somehow, that they should come back to the matter of that bargain. "I am pleased to *be* home," he said. "Though... I must admit to some distress."

Elias raised an eyebrow, and Albert frowned, trying to piece his thoughts together.

"I have found it... difficult to believe that I am truly back home," Albert said. "Though seeing you has done me good. And... I have had a shame which I cannot throw off, ever since I woke without my arm. But that makes even less sense. Somehow, I am ashamed that I had to stop the fighting... but I am *also* ashamed that I killed so many men. How I can be shamed about them both at once, I do not rightly know."

The weight upon Elias' shoulders grew heavier, and Albert saw a knowing look in the man's uncanny eyes.

"I understand your meaning," Elias said. "But this, at least, I can answer for you. Humans do not grasp the matter for some reason—but it is quite normal to feel many contradictory things at once. Emotions need not make sense, Albert. They are there so that *we* might make sense of them. It is your job to choose the shame that you prefer, though the ghost of the other one might remain."

Albert nodded slowly. He decided to politely overlook the reference to *humans*. He took a long sip of his tea, savouring the taste as he worked through the idea in his head.

He wasn't sure which shame he preferred, now that he thought on the matter. Neither one was very appealing.

I am sure that I shall need to spend another full year deciding, Albert thought with a sigh.

Elias interrupted his musings. "The Prince Regent has asked me to be his court magician," he said. He had a sour note in his voice. "He has offered to give me the title of *Lord Sorcier*, since that is the man I supposedly killed. He seems quite taken with the idea, in fact."

Albert frowned. "The Prince Regent has *offered?*" he asked. "Do you mean to say you have not yet taken him up on that offer?"

Elias shot him a dry look, and Albert remembered belatedly that he was talking to a man—or perhaps a faerie—who had little natural respect for English royalty. "I see," Albert said. "But should you not consider the offer? I mean to say... *I hope* you will be staying. And it is quite something to be offered a court position *and* a title."

Elias grew even more troubled at this suggestion. "I am not sure that I wish to serve England in any further capacity," he said. "I was right, Albert—though the French are defeated, the workhouses are worse than ever. I asked the Prince Regent if he intended to do anything about them, and he looked at me as though I was mad." He stared down into his teacup as though it had tried to conceal a terrible secret from him.

"It pleased me to protect the men I served with in France, as I had learned to like them," Elias said. "But I do not wish to serve a creature like the Prince Regent—nor to become a silly noble, like the other useless ones I've met."

Albert chuckled. "I see your concern," he said. "I like to believe that not all nobles are silly and useless, given that my father and my brother are two of those. But if it worries you, Elias, I would like to point out that *you* would not need to be a silly, useless noble. In fact, if you are elevated as Lord Wellington has been, you would have a seat in the House of Lords and a voice in exactly those matters which distress you." He paused. "My father has helped draft several reforms for the work-houses. They have never passed, of course—but you would have an ally in him, if you so wished."

Elias knitted his brow. Albert saw him turn the matter over in his head.

"...I shall take this all in mind," Elias said finally. He said it in the exact same tone he had used so long ago, when Albert had asked if he intended to leave the army. The magician cleared his throat. "But in the meantime... do you *enjoy* not having an arm, Albert?"

Albert blinked. "What an odd question," he said. "Of course I do not enjoy it, Elias."

Elias frowned. "Well, why then has no one made you a new one?" he asked, with a hint of tetchiness.

Albert raised his eyebrows. "I do not know anyone who is capable of *making* arms, Elias," he replied.

The magician flushed. "I was not aware that it was so uncommon," he said. "But you are incorrect, Albert—you know at least *one* man who is capable of making arms." He downed his teacup in one inelegant swallow. "It will take some time, of course. But I very much doubt you will be able to volunteer in the work-houses without one. And of course—if I am injured again, I should prefer to have you with two working arms."

Albert stared at the other man. He searched his mind for the proper sort of reply to something which was at once so generous and so outlandish. "I do not know what to say," he admitted finally. "Other than... well, what on earth will you make the arm *from*?"

Elias considered this seriously. "Out of silver, I should think," he said. "It's quite traditional, where I come from. Why, you'll be after the style of a famous king." The heaviness upon his shoulders lightened at the thought, and another smile came across his face. "Yes. I think that is what we will do."

OLIVIA ATWATER

A few days later—after Albert had requested a bed and a sort of workroom for their strange visitor—wild gossip went up among the *ton* of London.

There was now a court magician in England, they said. A powerful magician—one who routinely performed three impossible things before breakfast.

The Prince Regent had named him Lord Elias Wilder—England's first and only Lord Sorcier.

THE END

...or is it?

Lord Elias Wilder's story continues in *Half a Soul*, the first novel in the *Regency Faerie Tales* series.

AFTERWORD

Well-mannered people do not speak of ugly things like war. Fantastical romances might be allowed to scratch the very surface of it, but even a satire like *Half a Soul* could not focus on the realities of war for too long. Nearly the moment after I finished writing *Half a Soul*, I regretted that I was unable to give the Napoleonic Wars the emotional respect that they truly demanded. And so, in the space of perhaps two days, I wrote the things that Lady Hayworth did not want to hear.

I still worry that it all came out far too poetic. I know that real war is neither poetic nor enjoyable to read about. But it is at least more than Lady Hayworth will endure, and so it is one step better than it was before. I am certain that I will revisit the matter again someday, in a series far less whimsical.

I will leave off with a handful of heartfelt acknowledgements. Thank you to my alpha readers, **Laura Elizabeth** and **Julie Golick**, for always helping me to keep my head. I owe further thanks to **Dr. Kevin Linch** of the University of Leeds for his answers to several incredibly niche questions on the Napoleonic-era British military. Any remaining historical errors in the story are purely my own.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Olivia Atwater writes whimsical historical fantasy with a hint of satire. She lives in Montreal, Quebec with her fantastic, prose-inspiring husband and her two cats. When she told her second-grade history teacher that she wanted to work with history someday, she is fairly certain this isn't what either party had in mind. She has been, at various times, a historical re-enactor, a professional witch at a metaphysical supply store, a web developer, and a vending machine repairperson.



Want more Regency faerie tales? I send out writing updates and neat historical facts in the Atwater Scandal Sheets. Subscribers also get early access to chapters from each book, before anyone else!

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